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Current Protests in Algeria
Současné protesty v Alžírsku

BACHELOR THESIS

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Statutory Declaration

I herewith formally declare that I have written the submitted dissertation independently. I have quoted all the sources and literature properly and I have not submitted this dissertation to another examination body.

Čestné prohlášení

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V Praze dne 4.8.2020

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Jméno a příjmení studenta

Abstract

Protests in the Arab world during 2010-2011, also called *Arab Revolutions* and or the *Arab Spring*, lead to the fall of several autocratic regimes, the rise of new dictators, and a few civil wars. Although the wave of uprisings flooded many states of the Middle East and North Africa, the intensity and duration of the protests varied widely. Algeria was seemingly unaffected by these events. There, massive protests took place eight years later after the long-serving president Abdelaziz Bouteflika announced his candidacy for a new term. The goal of this research will be to answer the question of why where the 2019 protests in Algeria considerably more widespread than in 2011. This will be done, firstly, by studying the causes of the weak participation in the 2011 protests proposed in the academic literature. Secondly, the dissertation will compare existing explanations to the context of the 2019 protests. The study will focus on whether these explanations are still up to date, whether they lost or gained importance or whether these assumptions were flawed since the beginning. It asks the question of what led to such widespread protests in Algeria in 2019 in comparison to 2011? Did the opposition unity affect the protests in both years? What was its role, and did it have any impact on the size and duration of the protests?

The analysis will be primarily based on a review of the existing academic literature and on the analysis of newspaper articles from Algerian as well as international media, mainly French, English and Arabic, and on data from the Arab Barometer Survey. The dissertation argues that the opposition unity had an impact on the duration of the protests but little to no effect on the size of the protests.

Keywords

Protest Movement, Hirak, Opposition, Arab revolutions, Algeria

Abstrakt

Protesty v arabském světě během let 2010-2011, taktéž nazývané Arabské revoluce nebo Arabské jaro, vedly k pádu několika autokratických režimů, vzestupu nových diktátorů a několika občanským válkám. Vlna demonstrací zasáhla mnoho států Blízkého Východu, avšak protesty byly různorodé, především, co se týče počtu lidí a trvání. Alžírsko bylo zdánlivě nedotknuto tímto fenoménem. K masivním protestům došlo až osm let poté, co nejdéle sloužící prezident Alžírsko, Abdelazíz Bouteflika, oznámil, že bude znovu kandidovat. Cílem této práce bude zodpovědět otázku proč byly protesty v Alžírsku v roce 2019 o tolik rozšířenější než v roce 2011. Nejdříve se tato práce bude věnovat analýze důvodů předložených akademiky pro nízkou participaci protestujících a pro krátké trvání protestů v roce 2011. Poté se zaměří na porovnání existujících vysvětlení v kontextu protestů z roku 2019. Jsou tato vysvětlení stále aktuální? Získaly nebo ztratily na důležitosti anebo byly špatně už od začátku? Skrz analýzu těchto vysvětlení bude možné zodpovědět otázku co vedlo k o tolik rozšířenějším protestům v Alžírsku v roce 2019 oproti roku 2011? Jaká byla role opozice v těchto protestech a jak její (ne)soudržnost ovlivnila protesty? Měla vliv na velikost a trvání protestů?

Analýza vychází především z existující akademické literatury a novinových článků alžírských a mezinárodních médií, především francouzských, anglických a arabských. V rámci práce byla využita i data z Arab Barometer. Hlavním argumentem práce je, že soudržnost opozice měla vliv na trvání protestů, ale skoro žádný efekt na velikost protestů.

Klíčová slova

Protestní hnutí, Hirak, Opozice, Arabské revoluce, Alžírsko

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1.1 Introduction

Protests in the Arab world during 2010-2011 also called *Arab Revolutions* and or *Arab Spring* led to the fall of several autocratic regimes, the rise of new dictators, and a few civil wars. Although the wave of uprisings flooded many states of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), the intensity and duration of the protests varied widely. While Tunisia and Egypt experienced radical changes in the ruling regimes over a short period of time (it took only four weeks to oust President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali in Tunisia¹), Algeria was seemingly not affected by these events. The time for a change (whether radical is yet to be seen) arrived eight years later when a wave of massive protests known as *Hirak* (movement in Arabic) rocked the regime boat in context with the candidacy of President Abdelaziz Bouteflika for a new term. Bouteflika was the longest-serving head of state in Algerian history and his government promised substantial economic and political reforms. However, people saw their standard of living deteriorate and with the prospect of another five years of empty promises took to the streets.² Not only the duration of the protests was different on the two occasions – one month in 2011 in comparison with one year in 2019 – but also the size of the protests differed, with only several thousand protestors coming to the streets in 2011 compared to over a million in 2019.

The dissimilarity in the size and duration of the mobilization in 2011 and 2019 is puzzling, especially because the political situation remained similar in many ways. The regime had not become more violent or repressive towards its citizens nor had it changed in its structure. The unemployment rate was in decline in 2019,³ and people's trust in the army – the real kingmaker in the regime – had even risen since the 2011 protests.⁴ And yet, while in the first case, Algeria seemed to be “immune”⁵ to the Arab Spring protests, all of a sudden, in 2019, Algerians went on to protest in millions and kept doing so every Friday for 56 weeks.⁶

The aim of this dissertation is to compare the case of the 2011 protests to the *Hirak* protests of 2019 in order to better understand what led to the considerably more widespread mobilization in 2019. This is done, firstly, by studying the causes of the weak participation in the protests of

¹ Lust, E. (Ed.). (2017). The Middle East, p.68

² From Protesta to Hirak to Algeria's New Revolutionary Moment, in Middle East Report, 2019 (pp.10-14)

³ Unemployment, total (% of total labor force) (modeled ILO estimate) - Algeria. (n.d.). World Bank Open Data | Data. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.TOTL.ZS?locations=DZ>

⁴ Alkurd, D. (2019). Public Opinion and The Army, p.104

⁵ McAllister, E. (2013). Immunity to the Arab Spring?

⁶ Volpi, F. (2020). Algeria: When elections hurt democracy

2011, and its shorter duration, proposed by academics. Both media and the academic community have come forward with explanations as to why was the protest turnout so low and how the Algerian regime managed to “weather the storm”.⁷ Researchers pointed to the existence of oil revenues, the historic trauma caused by over a decade of the civil war, and the divisions among opposition groups and inside the society in general as the main causes for non-activation in 2011.⁸ Secondly, this dissertation focuses on the last identified explanation and asks what was the role of the opposition and how did its unity or the lack of it affect the mobilization in 2019 and in the years of the Arab Spring. I argue that the opposition disunity was an important factor that helps to explain the lower turnout of protestors and the duration of the protests in 2011 as opposed to 2019 because there are clear distinctions in the behaviour of the opposition movement in the respective years with *Hirak* being much more united in voicing its concerns and demands than the NCCD in 2011.

In my dissertation, I use the technique of comparison known as the Method of Difference which originates from John Stuart Mill’s *System of Logic* and which is also known as the *Most Similar System Design*.⁹ I compare two similar cases of protests in Algeria. The first wave of protests originated in 2011 and lasted for a month. The second wave started in 2019 and ended with the breakout of the coronavirus epidemic during spring 2020. Despite many similarities in the circumstances of the two protest events, one factor, opposition (dis)unity, stands out as different and thus can help to explain the difference in the protest duration and their size. By concentrating on its role, I will try to shed some light on this issue.

The analysis will be primarily based on academic literature and newspaper articles. While the academic research used in this dissertation is stemming mainly from the works of academic community focused specifically on Algeria, some topics, which apply to more countries, have been treated in more general or comparative works – for instance, those concerning the *oil curse*, in other words, the adverse effects of resource abundance. The majority of the existing academic literature that I worked with is focused explicitly on the explanation of protests in Algeria and covers the situation in 2011 and 2019. Other ones deal with more specific topics such as Islam in Algeria, the role of the Algerian security apparatus, oil extraction and impact

⁷ Del Panta, G. (2017). Weathering the storm

⁸ Martinez, L. (2011). L’algérie : un calme trompeur and Zeraoui, Z. (2012). Algeria: Revolution, army and political power and McAllister, E. (2013). Immunity to the Arab Spring?

⁹ *Seminar 5: How to select cases and make comparisons*. (2017, February 21). Political and Social Science. <https://socialscientificresearch.wordpress.com/2017/02/20/seminar-5-how-to-select-cases-and-make-comparisons/>

of its revenues, political situation in the country, and more related topics.

Information retrieved from newspaper articles is used mainly to underline specific factors, illustrate a situation, and to quote. I chose to use both Algerian newspaper agencies and international ones since the Algerian official press is under the control of the state. On the international scene, I focused on the large mainstream media such as BBC, Le Monde, Al-Jazeera, or the Washington Post although some smaller are represented as well. For the section about protests in 2011, I focused on current articles of that time. Concerning the section about *Hirak* and the events of 2019, I drew my information from articles written in 2019 – 2020. I also use data from the Arab Barometer. This survey serves as a basis for some of my analysis for chapter Alienation from Politics.

As for the limitations of my dissertation, the largest issue lies in access to up-to-date and valid information from Algeria. Since the Algerian press is somewhat under the control of the government and the state institutions are not transparent, some doubt can be cast on the facts retrieved from such sources. The same problem is exacerbated in the mainstream international press since the movement of independent journalists is limited, the large media gain their information from Algerian counterparts or they might follow some of its own narrative (for instance, Al-Jazeera is funded by the state of Qatar and BBC was engulfed in many of its own controversies, also when reporting on the Middle East¹⁰). To counter this problem, I sought to check the information on at least one different credible site (i.e. another journal with a different owner). Another issue with my dissertation lies in the description of *Hirak* and my analysis of the opposition unity in 2019-2020. Since this topic is still evolving, there are only a few academic works and analyses of the movement from which I could draw on. I therefore might be omitting some crucial factors or circumstances the importance of which is yet to emerge.

I begin in the first section of my dissertation with revisiting the term “Arab Spring” in the Algerian context and provide some necessary historical background in order to understand the unfolding of the protest events in 2011 and in 2019. In the second section, I review the relevant scholarly literature and the factors that researchers have proposed for the limited protest movement that occurred in 2010-2011, analyse the validity of their conclusions, and introduce the main concepts. The third section is dedicated to an analysis of the role of opposition

¹⁰ Hirsch, A. (2020, July 1). *Timeline: The battle to make BBC publish Balen report into Middle East conflict coverage*. the Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2009/feb/11/balen-report-bbc-timeline>

(dis)unity as a proposed factor behind the different duration and size of the protests in the two cases. I end my dissertation with concluding remarks on the findings of my research.

1.2 Historical Background

In order to understand the outcome of the Arab Spring in Algeria and to address the interest and commentary of both academics and the media on Algeria, a brief excursion into the country's history is required.

1.2.1 Algeria before the “Arab Spring”

As explained by Frederic Volpi in his study *Algeria vs the Arab Spring*, Algeria “had long been a troubled polity, where social order remained elusive” in comparison to the rest of its regional neighbours such as Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, and Morocco.¹¹ Algerians fought their colonial rulers, the French, for independence eventually securing it in 1962 after a hard-fought and bloody war. The anticolonial struggle was led by a nationalist movement *Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN) which later established a one-party regime. The FLN military wing had always great impact on the politics in Algeria and its chief of staff Hourari Boumeddiene seized power in a bloodless coup in 1965 installing himself as a president. The worsening of an economic situation and the dismantling of social reforms led to widespread protests during the late 1980s. These riots eventually resulted in the introduction of new political and economic reforms by the government. The first multiparty local elections were held in 1990 and the parliamentary elections in 1991.¹²

This point in Algerian history had a major influence on the decade to come. The elections were won to a great surprise of the regime by a religious party *Front Islamique du Salut* (FIS). The military annulled the elections in 1992 and in doing so triggered a brutal civil war between the Islamic armed groups and the regime backed by the army. The conflict claimed over 150 000 lives and lasted until a ceasefire in 1999 after which the army's high command introduced president Abdelaziz Bouteflika as the new president. Bouteflika's government stabilized the situation hence taking the credit for securing a peaceful transition even though “residual violence continued to plague the country” caused for example by Islamic Maghreb al-Qaeda.¹³

The immediate aftermath of this “Black decade”, as was the period of the civil war called, was a great deal of distrust among every niche of the Algerian society. This mutual mistrust was demonstrated in divided opposition to the regime and complications with alliance-building

¹¹ Volpi, F. (2013). *Algeria versus the Arab Spring*, p.105

¹² Volpi, F. (2013). *Algeria versus the Arab Spring*,

¹³ Zeraoui, Z. (2012). *Algeria: Revolution, army and political power*, p.140
and Volpi, F. (2013). *Algeria versus the Arab Spring*, p.106

across the political spectrum.¹⁴ Interestingly enough, people did not shy away from voicing their demands through protesting. Small-scale and localized protests – so-called “*protesta*” – were omnipresent¹⁵ and demonstrations ranging from peaceful strikes of workers to the Berber Spring in 2001 (riots in Kabylia region protesting the policies towards Berbers) took place.¹⁶ Algerians continued to protest “almost daily” during the years before the Arab Spring.¹⁷ The reasons for the popular unrests varied among each group of protestors. Most often, the protestors called on local government representatives to uphold promises of the central government such as the right to safe housing and access to municipal supply of water and gas.¹⁸

While *protesta* became a common mechanism for people to make the government address their local issues, the top political posts were tightly held by the Bouteflika administration. Although the administration promised both political and economic reforms, progress was very slow, and participation limited. The system also blocked any Islamic party originating from FIS from participating in elections. Even though the regime was praised by western democracies, mainly the USA, for its democratic reforms, for instance, the inclusion of other parties – the religious Islamic Movement for Peaceful Society and the nationalist National Democratic Rally – it showed rather a skilful use of patronage and co-optation than a proposed road to political liberalization.¹⁹

1.2.2 A Closer Look at the Arab Spring in Algeria

The actions that began in 2010 in Tunisia which were portrayed by the media as revolutionary for the region of the Middle East and North Africa are referred to chiefly as the Arab Spring. This term began to be used by the western media²⁰ hinting at two events in the history of Europe. Firstly, it refers to the Springtime of Nations, the popular upheavals in 1848 across Europe which led in some countries to regime change but mostly it was suppressed. Secondly, it reminds the reader of the Prague Spring of 1968, a concise period of liberalization of the

¹⁴ Entelis, J. P. (2011). Algeria: Democracy denied, and revived? and McAllister, E. (2013). New Middle Eastern Studies Immunity to the Arab Spring?

¹⁵ From Protesta to Hirak to Algeria's New Revolutionary Moment, in Middle East Report, 2019 (pp.10-14)

¹⁶ Silverstein, P. (2005). States of fragmentation in North Africa

¹⁷ Ambassador Robert Ford, “Scene Setter for A/S Welch Visit to Algeria,” U.S. Embassy in Algiers, 28 February 2008, Retrieved April 2, 2020, from https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/08ALGIERS198_a.html

¹⁸ Entelis, J. P. (2011). Algeria: Democracy denied, and revived? , p.673-6 and From Protesta to Hirak to Algeria's New Revolutionary Moment, in Middle East Report, 2019 (pp.10-14)

¹⁹ Ondřej Ditrych in Arabské Revoluce, p. 166-186

²⁰ Hollis, R. (2018). No friend of democratization, p.82

political situation under the communist regime in Czechoslovakia, which ended up contained as well.²¹

It is important to note that some Arab commentators reject this term as a western invention and prefer terms such as “awakening – *nahḍa*”, “revolution of dignity- *thawra al-karāma*” or simply “Arab revolutions – *ath-thawrāt al- ‘arabīya*”. Nevertheless, there seems to be no specific consensus on the use of these terms. Especially in Algeria, the events were referred to simply as “protests - *‘ihtijājāt*”. Therefore, I will refer to these events interchangeably as “2011 protests” and “Arab Spring” exactly because it is used widely among the academic community and both Arab and international media.²²

When reading the news during the protests in 2011, one might have thought that Algeria completely “missed the revolutionary bandwagon”.²³ Western media were primarily focused on other Middle Eastern countries, where people were protesting in large numbers, and reporters touched only sporadically on the situation in Algeria. One of the reasons for underreporting on the events in Algeria during the Arab Spring was the supposed lack of popular response to the call for protest. Even in the academic community, the discrepancy is visible. See for example www.ukaz.cuni.cz, counting only the English-written articles there were 1967 outcomes for key words Egypt AND Arab Spring while only 94 for Algeria AND Arab Spring.²⁴ The country was therefore largely viewed by both journalists and the academic community as a place where nothing happened and nothing changed from the status quo before the Arab Spring.²⁵ However, I want to show that this understanding of events is misleading. Algerians simply did not protest in the same manner as people in the rest of the region.

Algeria was one of the first countries affected by the Arab Spring because it borders with Tunisia, the epicentre of the uprisings, from which the protests spread out to other countries across the region. The protests in Tunisia coincided with shortages of basic goods and price

²¹ Schulze Wessel, M. (2018). Pražské jaro

²² Hollis, R. (2018). No friend of democratization, p.82

²³ Volpi, F. (2013). Algeria versus the Arab Spring

²⁴ *Základní vyhledávání*. (n.d.). EBSCO Publishing Service Selection

Page. <https://eds.a.ebscohost.com/eds/search/basic?vid=0&sid=86be93aa-0eb8-4039-aa89-c36048bdaf1c%40sdc-v-sessmgr02>

²⁵ Faiola, A. (2011, April 8). In Algeria, a chill in the Arab spring. Retrieved March 22, 2020, from

https://www.washingtonpost.com/gdpr-consent/?next_url=https%3a%2f%2fwww.washingtonpost.com%2fworld%2fin-algeria-a-chill-in-the-arab-spring%2f2011%2f04%2f07%2fAFdA9E4C_story.html

hikes in Algeria and centred around the sudden increase in the cost of living. Therefore, the first signs of discontent broke out early on the 3rd January in poorer outskirts of Algiers - Fouka and Staoueli and in Ras El Ain in Oran.²⁶ The situation quickly culminated into riots that spread around the country to all major cities in 20 wilayas (provinces) out of a total of 48. The protestors consisted mainly of young men who burned tires, set up roadblocks, and attacked and ransacked shopping centres, institutions connected to the state such as banks, post offices, and other government buildings.²⁷

On 8 January, the government decided to lower the taxes and duties on sugar and cooking oil and introduced new policies for the import of basic food stamps. These policies undertaken by the Bouteflika government had worked because by 11 January, only several protests continued sporadically, and the majority of protesters seemed to be quelled for the time being. Even though there were a few cases of people immolating themselves right after the largest momentum of the protests, it did not force people out to the streets again in such numbers.²⁸

However, as a direct consequence of this nationwide discontent, mainly left-wing opposition parties, human rights activist groups such as the Algerian League for Human Rights, and worker unions convened on 20th January and founded the National Coordination for Change and Democracy (NCCD) movement. This new pro-democratically oriented group immediately called for nationwide protests and signalled that there would be an organized protest in Algiers on 12 February in coordination with other activists and Islamist groups such as political movement Rachad. It was also supported by the Rally for Culture and Democracy, a Berber political party from Kabylia region, with its leader Said Saadi coordinating a protest on 22 January. This protest, however, did not attract so much attention of the society since it was organized by a Berber-related movement. Therefore, crucially, it was seen more through the prism of a struggle of a minority for recognition than a popular protest that anyone could identify with. The demonstration attended by few hundreds was quickly dispersed by the anti-

²⁶ Redouane, G. (2011, January 5). Les habitants de Ras el Ain protestent. *La Voix Del'Oranie*, p. 2.

²⁷ Al Jazeera. (2011, January 8). إثر تجدد الاحتجاجات بالجزائر translated as *Two dead after renewed protests in Algeria*. Retrieved March 22, 2020, from

<https://www.aljazeera.net/news/arabic/2011/1/8/%D9%82%D8%AA%D9%8A%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A5%D8%AB%D8%B1-%D8%AA%D8%AC%D8%AF%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%AA%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%A6%D8%B1>

²⁸

riot police.²⁹ Meanwhile, Bouteflika made use of the gap between the demonstrations and indicated to the government on the 3rd February that the state of emergency, which was imposed in 1992 at the beginning of the Black decade, would be lifted in “very near future”.³⁰

NCCD’s effort to replicate the developments in Egypt and Tunisia failed to gain momentum, as attested by the small number of demonstrators on the planned demonstration of 12 February where 3000 demonstrators on May First Square were guarded by around 30 000 policemen. This attempt to imitate the Tahrir Square demonstrations in Cairo was thus quickly suppressed.³¹ These pro-democratic struggles never attracted many protesters and were eventually overshadowed by a massive rally (tens of thousands) of the local police forces in the capital, demanding better salaries.³²

Bouteflika’s government responded to the protests in other than repressive way by repealing the laws of the state of emergency on 24 February.³³ By doing so, it officially limited the use of force by the repressive apparatus and allowed for the lifting of restrictions on free speech and assembly. The main reforms were announced after almost two months of silence. In a long-awaited televised speech in April 2011, the president revealed his plan for a new constitutional reform. He promised to create a specialized commission that would design the necessary amendments to the constitution in order to “strengthen democracy”³⁴. Current opposition parties - would also take part in the drawing up of the amendments together with law experts. He also introduced new laws such as information law highly used for jailing journalists, which

²⁹ Bamat, J. (2011, January 23). Algiers police crack down as opposition defies ban on protests. Retrieved March 31, 2020, from <https://www.france24.com/en/20110122-algeria-security-forces-thwart-opposition-march-rcd-democracy-algiers-tunisia>

³⁰ Provenzano, L. (2011, February 3). Vers la levée de l’état d’urgence en Algérie. Retrieved March 31, 2020, from <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/182539/politique/vers-la-lev-e-de-l-tat-d-urgence-en-alg-rie/>

³¹ Al Jazeera. (2011, February 12). الشرطة تتصدى لمظاهرة بالجزائر. Retrieved April 2, 2020, from <https://www.aljazeera.net/news/arabic/2011/2/12/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%B1%D8%B7%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%AF%D9%89-%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B8%D8%A7%D9%87%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%A6%D8%B1>

³² Al Jazeera (2011, March 7) الآلاف بالحرس البلدي الجزائري translated as Thousands of Algerian municipal guards demonstrate <http://www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/076E5CCC-3845-4736-8B89-FCB7F7CC8697.htm?GoogleStatID=9>

³³ *Algérie : L’état d’urgence leve en Algérie*. (2011, February 24). Le Monde.fr. Retrieved April 5, 2020, from https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2011/02/24/algerie-l-etat-d-urgence-leve-en-algerie_1484918_3212.html

³⁴ edogawa conandz (Youtube profile) (2011, April 15). كلمة رئيس الجمهورية الجزائرية عبد العزيز بوتفليقة translated as *Speech of the President of Algerian Republic Abdelaziz Bouteflika*, Retrieved April 2, 2020, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&v=QwiL4ROWWt4>

also included regulations for “responsible blogging”.³⁵ Lastly, the president signalled that the electoral law would be “revised in depth” with the participation of non-governmental parties. By then, the protests subsided and ebbed away.³⁶

Despite all these promises, Bouteflika did not replace the then active government and also did not specify a deadline when would these reforms take place. As a direct result of the establishment of the commission, opposition parties received more airtime on television and new parties were able to be created (with the exception of Islamic parties, which were still blocked from participation). This progress continued to be viewed by the opposition with suspicion and the leading parties decided to boycott any cooperation with the commission. Still, the number of officially recognized parties had risen from 22 to 40 by the end of the year.³⁷ For foreign commentators, these steps were a signal of a democratic transition, but the reality was different. In practice, the majority of new parties were either just offshoots of the main regime parties *Rassemblement National Démocratique* (RND) and FLN or movements founded in order to promote important businessmen and personalities who had been rubbing shoulders with the elites.³⁸ The immediate result of the reforms was therefore ostensibly more pluralistic system where, however, the regime related parties held on the reins of power. In the parliamentary elections in 2012, most of the new parties failed to receive more than 2% of the vote, hence it led only to the consolidation of power of the regime.

1.2.3 2019 and the *Hirak*

While the turnout of protestors in 2011 was trifling and the opposition was not able to work together in a coherent manner, the situation changed profoundly in 2019. The numerous crowds that continued to protest regularly against the system became known as *Hirak*.³⁹ This section covers the activities of *Hirak* and the response of the government.

³⁵ edogawa conandz(Youtube user) (2011, April 15). كلمة رئيس الجمهورية الجزائرية عبد العزيز بوتفليقة translated as *Speech of the President of Algerian Republic Abdelaziz Bouteflika*, Retrieved April 2, 2020, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&v=QwiL4ROWWt4>

³⁶ edogawa conandz(Youtube user) (2011, April 15). كلمة رئيس الجمهورية الجزائرية عبد العزيز بوتفليقة translated as *Speech of the President of Algerian Republic Abdelaziz Bouteflika*, Retrieved April 2, 2020, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&v=QwiL4ROWWt4>

³⁷ Volpi, F. (2013). *Algeria versus the Arab Spring*, p.112

³⁸ Volpi, F. (2013). *Algeria versus the Arab Spring*, p.112

³⁹ Desrues, T., & Gobe, É. (2019). Introduction : Quand l’Algérie proteste, p.3

The “initial spark”⁴⁰ that ignited the protests was the decision of the regime to let Bouteflika run for president yet again. All pro-regime parties and organizations endorsed him even though his health condition rendered him unable to be seen in public. Clearly, people were fed up with the economic situation in their country and this move of the regime to keep ill and old Bouteflika in office was understood by the public that no changes would be made to the current status quo.⁴¹

Therefore, six days after his candidature was announced on the 10 February the first demonstrations erupted in Kabylia region, and on Friday 22 February, the first waves of massive protests in major cities were reported. On the 1st March, an estimated three million protestors marched in the streets.⁴² The ruling elite was taken aback by this unexpected turnout and other candidates such as Louisa Hanoune and Ali Benflis quickly withdrew their candidatures, leaving Bouteflika as a sole candidate. In the meantime, several promises concerning the adoption of new reforms and rewriting of the constitution were made by Bouteflika if re-elected and the protests continued.

Student demonstrations took place every Tuesday and youth, in general, constituted the majority of protestors even on Fridays. On 9 March, the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research decided to prolong the upcoming holidays in order for the tumult to calm down. However, the very next day, Ahmed Gaid Salah, the Chief of Staff of the Algerian army gave a speech to cadets in which he affirmed that “the army and the people had a common vision of the future”.⁴³ Slowly, dissenting voices from pro-regime parties began to oppose the fifth-term.⁴⁴

Under pressure, Bouteflika announced that he would not seek a new term and proposed a revision of the constitution, while keeping his mandate until new elections. This suggestion did not manage to placate the mobilizing crowds and when Gaid Salah, once Bouteflika’s stout

⁴⁰ Volpi, F. (2020). Algeria: When elections hurt democracy, p.1

⁴¹ Serres, T. (2019). Understanding Algeria’s 2019 Revolutionary Movement

⁴² Ouali, H.. (2019, March 7). *Algérie : Et Le camp «Boutef» flippa.*

Libération.fr. https://www.liberation.fr/planete/2019/03/07/algerie-et-le-camp-boutef-flippa_1713690

⁴³ *Algérie: L’armée declare partager la meme vision Que Le peuple.* (2019, March 11).

RFI. <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20190311-algerie-armee-declare-partager-meme-vision-le-peuple>

⁴⁴ Serres, T. (2019). Understanding Algeria’s 2019 Revolutionary Movement

supporter, recommended that Bouteflika should be declared “unfit to rule” by the Constitutional Council, the president finally capitulated. His abdication was announced on the 2nd of April.⁴⁵

Once Bouteflika stepped down, an interim government was installed under Abdelkader Bensalah, former president of the upper house. The goals of the movement evolved and now the protesters began to demand the resignation of the provisional government, especially the so-called “three B’s” – Abdelkader Bensalah, Nouredine Bedoui (Prime Minister appointed by Bouteflika), and Tayeb Belaiz (President of the Constitutional Council). Since every one of them belonged to the old “gang”, it was no surprise they attracted the ire of protesters.⁴⁶ New elections were scheduled to be held on 4 July but the pressure from the street convinced the opposition parties not to participate in the upcoming election. Eventually, the interim government abandoned this plan and the elections were adjourned because of the lack of candidates.⁴⁷

When this effort to appease the protestors through an election failed, a new strategy was implemented by the regime. An anticorruption campaign against business and political figures closely tied to Bouteflika started off. “Iconic crony capitalists” like Mahieddine Tahkout, Rhéda Kouninef, and Ali Haddad were arrested with the brother of Bouteflika Said and former heads of the intelligence services Tawfik Mediene and Bachir Tartag.⁴⁸ Despite this highly publicized campaign and promises to reopen investigations into corruption scandals, many members of the regime connected to embezzlement of public money were left untouched.⁴⁹

In the meantime, the movement was trying to put together a roadmap for reforms and solidify the common ground. However, this proved to be problematic since the protesters distrusted the co-opted political parties. *Hirak* could demonstrate against a common enemy but was at the same time unable to present a common vision of reforms and changes.⁵⁰ As with other contemporary protest movements, *Hirak* was leaderless and that exacerbated the issue of representation of the movement and negotiation with the regime.⁵¹

⁴⁵ Makedhi M. . (2019, April 2). *Sous la pression de la mobilisation populaire : Bouteflika abdique*. El Watan. <https://www.elwatan.com/a-la-une/sous-la-pression-de-la-mobilisation-populaire-bouteflika-abdique-02-04-2019>

⁴⁶ Desrues, T., & Gobe, É. (2019). Introduction : Quand l’Algérie proteste

⁴⁷ Serres, T. (2019). Understanding Algeria’s 2019 Revolutionary Movement

⁴⁸ Volpi, F. (2020). Algeria: When elections hurt democracy

⁴⁹ Serres, T. (2019). Understanding Algeria’s 2019 Revolutionary Movement

⁵⁰ Desrues, T., & Gobe, É. (2019). Introduction : Quand l’Algérie proteste

⁵¹ Boubekeur, A. (2020). *Demonstration Effects*, p.16

Under such circumstances, the interim government set the date of upcoming elections on 12 December. Protests continued because every one of the five candidates was somehow connected to the regime. Campaigns of the contestants were regularly met with public hostility and therefore the bulk of campaigns played out over state-sponsored televisions and online. Nevertheless, the elections took place and Abdelmadjid Tebboune, former prime minister under Bouteflika, won the race.⁵² However, the situation in the streets did not change so much, protests continued until the break-out of the coronavirus disease. As of this writing, in May 2020, *Hirak* cancelled its protests in order to contain the spread of the virus, but it is expected that demonstrations will continue once the situation returns to a normal state after quelling the epidemic.⁵³

Clearly, 2019 protests were in many ways different in comparison with the year 2011. Protestors managed to keep the demonstrations alive for an entire year and gather in large numbers. They pressured several key governmental figures to resign, provoked the government into action, and attracted the attention of the army for negotiations. However, real changes in the system did not take place.

⁵² Akef A.. (2019, December 13). *Qui est Abdelmadjid Tebboune, Le vainqueur de l'élection présidentielle en Algérie ?* Le Monde.fr. https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2019/12/13/qui-est-abdelmadjid-tebboune-le-vainqueur-de-l-election-presidentielle-en-algerie_6022759_3212.html

⁵³ Abouzzohour, Y (2020). COVID in the Maghreb

1.3 Literature Review and Factor Analysis

Now that some basic historical facts are established, we can take a closer look at the existing academic literature and the factors that were proposed to explain the weaker mobilization in Algeria compared to some other countries where the Arab Spring took place in 2010 and 2011. This section then analyses how the situation evolved prior to 2019 with respect to these explanations and problematizes their explanatory weight.

Ever since the explosion of protests in the MENA in 2010, journalists and academics were firstly trying to pinpoint the reasons for this sudden political upheaval in a region full of long-serving dictators and “durable authoritarianism”.⁵⁴ Secondly, they were attempting to confront the stereotypes about the MENA region in a sense that political backwardness is caused by Islam, Arab culture, or poverty⁵⁵. Algeria did not enjoy so much of a spotlight on the frontpages as for instance Egypt or Tunisia but nevertheless, some tried to explain the differences in mobilization and actual outcomes of the protests.

Stemming principally from a widespread belief that the “wind of change” will spread to many countries because of their cultural and socio-economic similarity,⁵⁶ some journalists and politicians expected the spread of the phenomenon (of Arab Spring) like a “virus”.⁵⁷ Throughout the western media, phrases like “Why has the Arab Spring not spread to Algeria?”⁵⁸ or “Is Algeria immune to Arab Spring?”⁵⁹ were echoed incredulously. Many journals and media outlets were quick to conclude that virtually nothing happened in Algeria in comparison to other countries even though the reality on the ground was different, as I showed in the previous chapter.

⁵⁴ Bellin, E. (2012). *Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East*, p.128

⁵⁵ Masoud, T. (2015). *Has the door closed on Arab democracy?*

⁵⁶ See Lamb, G. (2012, February 22). *Why narrowly cast the push for democracy as the “Arab spring”?* | Graeme Lamb. Retrieved April 2, 2020, from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/feb/22/democracy-arab-spring>

⁵⁷ See Clemons, S. (2011, November 21). *The Arab Spring: “A Virus That Will Attack Moscow and Beijing.”* Retrieved April 2, 2020, from <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2011/11/the-arab-spring-a-virus-that-will-attack-moscow-and-beijing/248762/>

⁵⁸ Ghezall, R. (2011, June 3). *Why Has the Arab Spring Not Spread to Algeria?* Retrieved April 2, 2020, from https://www.huffpost.com/entry/why-has-the-arab-spring-n_b_844182?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2x1LmN6Lw&guce_referrer_sig=AQAADyQtmERxrSln4eXdakoVtA1-N6DEMsOwZvHUmyY15kE-MF9DTE4_8oz5ZAQv1J7BYREaQY19EXBliyg0oEj1w1H1JOEaE6qnnFa72vjwx7RiS7TiTmqQOWDsAuWjN5REtXnjp_B14ITQKPUIKAgnzyToD83D8-OqRpEiF78lgTze

⁵⁹ BBC News. (2011, July 27). *Is Algeria immune from the Arab spring?* Retrieved March 27, from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-14167481>

Most cited explanations for the perceived lack of protests in the academic works were along the lines of the fear of repression based on “spectre of the civil war”⁶⁰. Right behind came the ability of the regime to allocate the oil rents effectively to appease and even “please” the people.⁶¹ Lastly, the splintered opposition unable to stand up to a well-oiled state security apparatus was presented.⁶² While some works covered these issues to a larger extent and dissected the explanations, other ones subscribed to the same conclusions given by the press.

When analysing the academic research, six main factors explaining the inability of society to mobilize emerge.

1. The oil revenues resulting in appeasing the citizens
2. the vivid memory of traumatic events
3. the Alienation from politics
4. the opposition disunity
5. the threat of foreign intervention
6. the well-functioning state coercive powers

How do these explanations, which were expected to discourage demonstrations in 2011, stand their ground today, in light of the 2019 Hirak protest wave?

⁶⁰ Achy, L. (2011, March 31). Why did protests in Algeria fail to gain momentum? Retrieved March 27, , from <https://foreignpolicy.com/2011/03/31/why-did-protests-in-algeria-fail-to-gain-momentum/>

⁶¹ BBC News. (2011, July 27). Is Algeria immune from the Arab spring? Retrieved March 27, , from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-14167481>

⁶² Lahcen, A. (2013). The Myth of Stability in Algeria

1.3.1 Traumatic Memories

Numerous works treat the puzzling outcome in 2011 predominantly from the perspective of traumatic events in the country's history (Baghzouz, 2011; Chena, 2011; Entelis, 2011; Lahcen, 2013; Zeraoui, 2012; Zoubir, 2011). In the words of Salim Chena:

(...) the fear of sinking into violence again certainly plays a role in the weakening of the mobilization. Let us recall that the civil war that started in 1991 left nearly 200,000 dead, resulted in 20,000 disappearances and displaced 1.5 million people. And the "Black Spring" of 2001 in Kabylia claimed the lives of 132 people.⁶³

Similarly, Achy Lahcen writes: "The horrors of Algeria's civil war, in which 150,000 to 200,000 people lost their lives in personal, terrifying acts of butchery, are never far from Algerians' minds."⁶⁴ It was argued that this fear factor was even more exacerbated by the developments in Libya and Syria where the situation deteriorated over a short period of time (following the 2011 protests). The Algerian government was quick to use the argument about the possibility of foreign intervention to deter its people from protesting (McAllister, 2013; Zoubir, 2011). This argument was omnipresent in the media and in the academic work. Leader of the Islamist party *Islah* (Reform) Abdallah Djaballah commenting on the events of 2011 stated that "Algeria is still licking the wounds of its past"⁶⁵.

According to this explanation, the traumatic decade caused the society to be so docile and wary of acting in fear of repetition of the violent response. Moreover, some even argue that it was the time when Algeria had experienced its own Arab Spring.⁶⁶ The promised political liberalization, which was implemented after the protests of October 1988 was quickly extinguished by the military coup in 1991. The consequences were bloody clashes and a war that impacted the life of every citizen.⁶⁷

Although the troubling memory of these events according to these authors "hangs over the national consciousness",⁶⁸ there is a clear evidence that fear of the repressive forces is a disputable explanation for the supposed lack of mobilization. Algerians are no strangers to riots,

⁶³ Chena, S. (2011). L'ALGÉRIE DANS LE « PRINTEMPS ARABE », p.109

⁶⁴ Lahcen, A. (2013). The Myth of Stability in Algeria, p.12

⁶⁵ *Pourquoi Les Algériens restent en Marge du printemps arabe*. (2011, December 8). France 24. Retrieved April 6, 2020, from <https://www.france24.com/fr/20111207-algerie-soulevements-printemps-arabe-maghreb-bouteflika-manifestation-islamisme>

⁶⁶ McAllister, E. (2013). Immunity to the Arab Spring?, p.14.

⁶⁷ Del Panta, G. (2017). Weathering the storm, p.1087

⁶⁸ Entelis, J. P. (2011). Algeria: Democracy denied, and revived?, p.675

organized protests, strikes, and other forms of action that display their dissatisfaction with living conditions and the regime. Localized protests were regularly erupting in Kabylia, a region with a Berber majority, since 1998. Back then, after the assassination of a famous singer Lounès Matoub and the death of a teenager Massinissa Guermah in prison, Berbers took to the streets. Believing that the government was directly responsible for the two deaths, violent riots broke out in provincial cities of Tizi Ouzou, Bejaia, and other localities. During the series of events, which came to be known as Black spring, at least 60 people died and 300 were injured.⁶⁹

Another wave of turmoil began in 2005 following a doubling of the price of butane in 2004, especially in the southern wilayas which hold most of the Algerian gas and oil reserves. These “gas riots” revealed the discontent of the southern regions with unequal distribution of wealth produced by oil and gas revenues.⁷⁰ While these were the two major public disturbances against the regime, thousand more local protests took place during the rule of Bouteflika. As McAllister recounts, “[o]fficial figures show 112,878 interventions by riot police in 2010 and 18 interventions per day in the first half of 2011.”⁷¹

In sum, this argument is unsatisfactory given the sheer amount of police interventions. The traumatic events of Algeria’s past constituted certainly a turning point for many citizens, however, it did not discourage them from expressing their needs and views publicly, even, through violent protests.

1.3.2 Threat of Foreign Intervention and the Role of the Security Apparatus

While presenting itself as a bulwark against threats of foreign military action and the possibility of descending into the chaos of a civil war, the establishment applied skilfully its security apparatus. The army and the security services, which are interconnected and controlled by the head of the state, played a major role in containing the riots described above (Chena, 2011; Lahcen, 2013; Volpi, 2013; Zeraoui, 2012).

The NATO-led intervention in Libya dominated the news across the globe. The largely French-led airstrikes in Libya were cited as a “deterrent against an all-out rebellion”.⁷² There is no doubt that the intervention in Libya had a staggering impact on the perception of the term “humanitarian intervention” and on the ensuing civil war in Libya.⁷³ However, there is little to

⁶⁹ Silverstein, P. (2005). States of fragmentation in North Africa, p.28

⁷⁰ Martinez, L. (2011). L’algérie : un calme trompeur, p.1-2

⁷¹ McAllister, E. (2013). Immunity to the Arab Spring?, p.1

⁷² Zoubir, Y. H. (2011). The Arab Spring, p.1-5

⁷³ Kuperman, A. J. (2013). A Model Humanitarian Intervention?, p.133-136

no evidence to be found supporting its influence on participation in protesting around Algeria during the first months of 2011. Demonstrations against the Qadhafi regime erupted in Libya during February. In Syria, the first reported protests tied to the Arab Spring took place at the end of January. As written earlier, the most violent riots in Algeria broke out on the 3rd of January.⁷⁴ Given the fact that the first upheavals began sooner in Algeria than in both Libya and Syria, it is rather hard to prove the connection between fear of the spill-over of the violence, chaos, and the potential foreign intervention and the poor mobilization of protesters. If anything, it could have led to a more cautious attitude later on, for instance, during the 2019 protests.

As for the security apparatus argument, Algeria boasts one of the most numerous security forces in the region with a massive budget thanks to the revenues from oil. Statistics on the real numbers of armed personnel differ. According to the World Bank database, the Algerian army disposed of over 317,000 armed military personnel in 2011. Scholars tend to agree on 130,000 – 150,000 active military personnel and around 150,000 reservists, even though there exist estimates of 300,000 active soldiers.⁷⁵ Furthermore, the number of police and gendarmes quadrupled during the rule of Bouteflika, jumping from 50,000 in 1994 to approximately 200,000 in 2012.

Some researchers thus argue that it was precisely the strategic work of the armed forces that prevented the amplification of demonstrations. First, the Algerian forces are skilled due to its experience with handling the continuous social unrest and protests. Instead of firing live bullets into the demonstrators, as happened elsewhere in the region, they made use of their crowd-control training and anti-riot trucks. During the peak of the protests during January, the police and the army left suburbs abandoned to the mobs, avoided direct clashes, and focused only on protecting key areas such as governmental buildings. Second, when the first calls for organized demonstrations in Algiers emerged, security forces were deployed to divide the demonstrators into smaller groups, thus taking away the notion of strength from crowd mobilization, and to block entry points into the city and cordon off the May First Square. Third, all of these

⁷⁴Syria: Al Jazeera (الثورة السورية) (2016, March 8) (الجزيرة نت: آخر أخبار اليوم حول العالم) translated as *The Syrian Revolution*.. Retrieved April 6, 2020,

from <https://www.aljazeera.net/encyclopedia/events/2016/3/7/الثورة-السورية>

Libya: Al Arabiya (الغضب الليبي) (2011, February 17) 19 قتيلاً برصاص الأمن ببنغازي والبيضاء في خميس الغضب الليبي 19 Translated as *19 Shot Dead by the Security Forces in Benghazi and Al-Bayda on Thursday, the Libyan Day of Rage*.. Retrieved April 6, 2020,

from <https://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/02/17/138034.html>

⁷⁵ Lahcen, A. (2013). *The Myth of Stability in Algeria* and Zeraoui, Z. (2012). *Algeria: Revolution, army and political power*

procedures resulted in arrests, injuries, and low count of deaths, hence according to some, not providing the uprising with martyrs.⁷⁶

Obviously, the inability of capturing a major public area such as the Pearl Roundabout in Manama or Tahrir Square in Cairo was a major blow to the efforts of the protesters. However, the phenomenon of martyrdom in Algeria is nothing new. The first self-immolation case happened in 2004 because of the confiscation of personal assets and ever since the list only grew. At the beginning of 2011, there were 30 attempts of self-immolation eventually leading to six deaths.⁷⁷ Did Muhammad Bouazizi not spark a revolution with his martyrdom in Tunisia? Remarkably, in Tunisia and Egypt, the brutality of the security apparatus led to an exacerbation of the crisis, however, when considering all the factors, it is questionable, whether the work of skilled security apparatus should be credited for the discouragement of protesters in Algeria when the crowds were small in the first place. Especially when one compares it to the same tactics of security apparatus in 2019 and a vastly different outcome.

1.3.3 The Oil Curse

For the next factor, it was extensively advocated that the regime's stability depended on its "well-oiled"⁷⁸ co-optation tactics. The government profited from high prices of oil in the years before the Arab Spring and therefore held a massive reserve fund of 150 million dollars. This cash from oil revenues allowed for generous handouts to the public sector.⁷⁹ Therefore, according to numerous researchers, it was the oil revenues that enabled the regime to buy people off and that kept the society at bay (Chena, 2011; Lahcen, 2013; Martinez, 2011). Was it the revenues from oil and gas that subsequently persuaded the people to avoid the protests? In order to answer this question, it is useful to understand the expression *resource curse*.

"The main indicators of the resource curse are economic decline and democratic deficit in resource-rich countries "⁸⁰

According to a significant comparative study by Ross⁸¹, there are three effects to the oil curse. The "rentier effect" means that oil-rich countries need not tax their citizens so heavily because of the profits generated by the extraction of resources. The "repression effect" proposes that

⁷⁶ Lahcen, A. (2013). The Myth of Stability in Algeria

⁷⁷ Chena, S. (2011). L'ALGÉRIE DANS LE « PRINTEMPS ARABE » ,p.105

⁷⁸ Volpi, F. (2013). Algeria versus the Arab Spring, p.109

⁷⁹ Martinez, L. (2011). L'algérie : un calme trompeur, p.3

⁸⁰ Kehl, J. R. (2011). Rethinking the Resource Curse Kehl

⁸¹ Ross, M. L. (2001). Does Oil Hinder Democracy?

through a generous budget and bought loyalty the repressive forces have the means and the will to support the incumbent authorities. Lastly, the “modernization effect” causes the countries to slow down its cultural and social shifts, therefore blocking liberalization and democratic movements.⁸² Others have claimed that the creation of an opposition coalition, which is crucial to the promotion of liberalizing tendencies into democratization, proves to be difficult to achieve in a country under these effects.⁸³ However, subsequent studies both firmly supported these findings (Ulfelder, 2007) and were highly sceptical (Haber & Menaldo, 2011; Herb, 2009).

Although these effects seem to hold for Algeria (there are some discrepancies – for instance, there are 7 direct and many more indirect levied taxes in Algeria, thus, the state does not rely entirely on its oil revenues⁸⁴), I will not go into depth about these effects because I believe they are not the key to this issue. As Haber & Menaldo, 2011 argue in their study about the relationship between resources and authoritarianism, there are “inconvenient facts” that one needs to take into account first. Countries in the MENA region have a long history of tribal social organization, authoritarian ruling before the discovery of oil, and crucially, MENA countries without oil (for example Jordan and Syria) are authoritarian as well.⁸⁵ However, oil and gas are important assets to the Algerian economy and subsequently to the government.⁸⁶ Let us take a look at the situation on and especially in the ground in Algeria.

Naturally, oil and gas extraction remains a crucial driver for the Algerian economy. As of 2018, “the oil and gas sector is the backbone of the economy, accounting for about 20% of the gross domestic product, and 85% of total exports “(OPEC : Algeria, n.d.), while according to the late minister of Economy Ghazi Hanouci around 200,000 people out of 34,5 million benefit from the oil rents.⁸⁷ The majority of the oil and gas fields are located in the southern *wilayas* and near the border with Libya. It was almost unequivocally agreed in literature that in order to understand the dialogue between the state and the society one must comprehend that the military-industrial complex and its national oil and gas extracting company *Sonatrach* are tightly linked. The power of SOEs (State Owned Enterprises) cannot be underestimated since the state takes the form of an employer, investor, and regulator in the economy. The system of

⁸² Ross, M. L. (2001). Does Oil Hinder Democracy?

⁸³ Karl, T. L. (2007). Democracy Over a Barrel, p.15

⁸⁴ Le système fiscal algérien pour 2020, document of the Algerian Ministry of Finance, Retrieved from <https://www.mfdgi.gov.dz/index.php/com-smartslider3/2014-03-24-14-23-7/brochures-fiscales/147-systeme-fiscal-algerien>

⁸⁵ Haber, S., & Menaldo, V. (2011). Do natural resources fuel authoritarianism?

⁸⁶ Chena, S. (2011). L'ALGÉRIE DANS LE « PRINTEMPS ARABE »

⁸⁷ Chena, S. (2011). L'ALGÉRIE DANS LE « PRINTEMPS ARABE » p.110

exploitation is designed so that Sonatrach controls 75% of hydrocarbon production and International Oil Corporations own the rest giving the government decision-making power over its reserves.⁸⁸

Thanks to its oil riches and the increase in the price of oil during the decade before the Arab Spring, the state was able to work with a fund of over 150 million dollars, subsidizing many sectors of the economy so that every citizen could benefit. From social housing, electricity, cars to civil servants, and government contracts this system of generous handouts has, according to Lahcen 2013, “largely constituted the basis of the regime’s legitimacy”.⁸⁹ For example, when the riots in 2011 began, the administration was able to dip into this pool of saved money and placate the popular anger. Salaries of civil servants were raised by 50%, farmers were supported with extra cash, interest-free loans were granted as an incentive for new small businesses, and basic commodities such as sugar, wheat, and milk were heavily subsidized.⁹⁰

Nonetheless, the government reacted quickly in January to lower the prices of basic goods, yet the gargantuan 25-billion-dollar project was only made public in April 2011. The situation had by that time allayed back to the “normalcy” of local protests.⁹¹ That is not to say that oil revenues were not an important asset to the regime, but its impact on the protests in 2011 is questionable.

Surprisingly, I could not find any data about the government trying to placate the demonstrators through financial means in 2019. In comparison with the protests in 2011, there were no handouts or subsidized goods in response to the protests in 2019. On the other hand, in 2014 the international price of oil collapsed, and austerity measures needed to be discussed.⁹² However, both in the academics’ works and the news articles during 2019, oil rents did not play a big role.

1.3.4 Alienation from politics

The disregard for politics and the depoliticization of society which have roots in both still-too-recent trauma from the civil war and in the savvy co-optation of the public by utilizing the oil revenues and other means could be one of the reasons why there were no large-scale protests in 2011. One cannot omit this view when trying to explain why no national movement

⁸⁸ Entelis, J. P. (2011). *Algeria: Democracy denied, and revived?*

⁸⁹ Lahcen, A. (2013). *The Myth of Stability in Algeria*

⁹⁰ Lahcen, A. (2013). *The Myth of Stability in Algeria*

⁹¹ Volpi, F. (2013). *Algeria versus the Arab Spring*, p.108

⁹² *From Protesta to Hirak to Algeria’s New Revolutionary Moment*, in *Middle East Report*, 2019 (pp.10-14)

succeeded in keeping the protests continuous (Baghzouz, 2011; Chena, 2011; Lahcen, 2013; McAllister, 2013).

According to the second wave of surveys undertaken in 2012 by Arab Barometer, only 15,5% of Algerians were interested in politics, 62% were dissatisfied with the government, 80% believed that the administrative system is corrupt and 97% were not members of any political party.⁹³ What were the causes of this alienation from politics? According to Entelis (2011) and McAllister (2013), October 1988 was the moment when all hopes were high for the reform of the system, political liberalization, and economic restructuring. The 1990s however contrasted starkly with the appetite for change in the 1980s and until today, older generations of Algerians look at political liberalization as the main cause of the civil war and a gateway for Islamists.⁹⁴ It was no wonder that Algerians had been wary to join any large-scale movement when the last one was understood as a cause of war. The war in turn was “responsible for (...) demobilising what was the most politically assertive society in the Arab World”.⁹⁵

However, it would be too simplistic to blame once again only the civil war as other mechanisms of Algerian politics also contributed to the alienation. Under Bouteflika, the regime slowly transitioned from a typical authoritarian one-party state to an authoritarian pluralism – this system was described as “periodic distribution of shares among majority stakeholders”,⁹⁶ meaning that the regime incorporated different parties with the same agenda – support of the regime – into the decision-making process. On one hand, it joined forces with *Mouvement de la Société pour la Paix* (MSP) and *Rassemblement National Démocratique* (RND) (what are those parties?), aiming at broadening its base of supporters. On the other hand, the system co-opted other non-opposition parties, which resulted in the bolstering of the regime’s pluralistic and democratic façade. Therefore, no matter which party people voted for, the regime always made sure that there would be no change to the status quo – *la démocratie*.⁹⁷

As shown earlier Algerians are accustomed to protesting on a small scale almost incessantly.

⁹³ *Démocratie, gouvernement, religion, partis, économie, citoyenneté...*, CE *Que pensent Les Algériens*. (2012, January 17). El Watan. Retrieved April 6, 2020, from <https://www.elwatan.com/archives/enquete/democratie-gouvernement-religion-partis-economie-citoyennete-ce-que-pensent-les-algeriens-17-01-2012>

⁹⁴ McAllister, E. (2013). Immunity to the Arab Spring?,

⁹⁵ McAllister, E. (2013). Immunity to the Arab Spring?, p.13

⁹⁶ McDougall, J. (2007). After the War, p.40

⁹⁷ Volpi, F. (2013). Algeria versus the Arab Spring, p.106 and McAllister, E. (2013). Immunity to the Arab Spring?, p.13-14

However, a national, all-encompassing movement was not regarded as a means of fighting for its needs given the aftermath of October 1988.

1.3.5 Opposition Unity

One of the last factors which are suggested across the academia is the atomised opposition. The inability of the opposition to unite itself against a common enemy permitted the regime to have the upper hand (Baghzouz, 2011; Chena, 2011; Lahcen, 2013; McAllister, 2013).

According to Lahcen (2013), there were several points of contention among the opposition parties, unions, and other movements.⁹⁸ Public demonstrations were officially banned and the parties were cautious to voice their support for the protests and did not issue an effective call into action.⁹⁹ As Chena (2011) reflects, the opposition was divided into many smaller camps, which rendered it susceptible to co-optation by the system. This in turn led to distrust among regular people in the opposition parties.¹⁰⁰ In a view of Baghzouz (2011), the opposition parties reacted to the events of Arab Spring in a very “heterogeneous manner”, which resulted in almost no level of viable coordination of any actions they could have taken.¹⁰¹

In comparison to the number of works treating the situation in Algeria during and before the protests in 2011, only several academic papers concentrate on the year 2019 and Hirak. The nature of these works is less analytical and more descriptive, which makes sense given the topicality of the events. My analysis stems primarily from works focusing on the political dynamics of 2019 in Algeria (Boubekeur, 2020; Volpi, 2020), works that focus specifically on the role of *Hirak* in the society and its regional dynamics and impact (Desrues & Gobe, 2019), analysis of Arab Barometer opinion survey (Alkurd, 2019), and an article treating the tactics of *Hirak* employed during the protests (Serres, 2019). Both Volpi (2020) and Boubekeur (2020) point out the differences in opposition manoeuvring during 2011 and 2019. Desrues & Gobe (2019) shed light on the distrust among people towards opposition parties in 2011. The opposition does not play a major role in these works but it is mentioned, perhaps, because it represents a phenomenon on which one can show the progress done since 2011.

Clearly, works concerning the 2011 protests value the opposition (dis)unity highly – it is described as a driving factor for the inability of the society to protest against the government.

⁹⁸ Lahcen, A. (2013). The Myth of Stability in Algeria

⁹⁹ Lahcen, A. (2013). The Myth of Stability in Algeria

¹⁰⁰ Chena, S. (2011). L’ALGÉRIE DANS LE « PRINTEMPS ARABE »

¹⁰¹ Baghzouz, A. (2011). L’Algérie et les révoltes arabes

The Hirak protests in 2019 saw a different outcome than the protests in 2011 and also, the behaviour of the opposition was different, as noted by the academia.

1.3.6 Summary of the Factors

To sum it up, only two factors hold its place in light of the analysis – Alienation from politics and the Opposition unity. Alienation from politics was not mentioned in the works covering 2019 and while it might have changed, I will not treat it in my dissertation because it represents more of a phenomenon which stems from other factors (such as the Traumatic Memories). However, opposition unity was problematic in 2011 and its role was clearly different during the 2019 protests. It seems that the opposition unity occupies an important place even though it is not mentioned so much in 2019 as in 2011 and its role is not as well described so far. Therefore, in the next section of my dissertation, I will analyse the role of opposition unity during both protests in detail. I will focus chiefly on the ability of opposition unity to influence the size and the duration of the demonstrations. As for the rest of the factors that were proposed as explanations for the outcome of the 2011 protests, I believe they are irrelevant for my analysis because of the following reasons: (1) Memories of trauma did not discourage Algerians from expressing their needs and views publicly, even, through violent protests. (2) The threat of foreign intervention seems irrelevant due to the timing of the events. (3) The role of security apparatus was overestimated in the literature because the number of protestors had been small from the beginning and the actions of the security did not change that. (4) The oil rents were used to placate Algerians in 2011 but not the protestors. The timing of the events proves this factor irrelevant as well.

1.4 Opposition

In this section, I begin with an overview of main rifts in the society in Algeria, i.e. the key issues the opposition had to deal with in 2011 and 2019. I then explain the different approaches of the opposition in 2011 and 2019 that eventually led to different outcomes in protestor turnout and a contrasting duration of the protests in respective years. During 2011, the opposition parties and various movements remained atomised and did not manage to rally the protestors around one uniting cause. Labour unions, associations, and other groups preferred to continue in their small-scale protests focused on one particular issue as they were used to from previous years (such as low salaries, little housing options, higher prices of basic goods, etc.). On the contrary, in 2019, the opposition did not start the protests. It simply joined the protestors and formed a platform through which people could voice their demands. This platform included all currents represented in the Algerian society and was aimed against the regime from the beginning. This helped to keep the protests alive for such a long time.

1.4.1 The Cleavage

The atomisation of society played a central role in the mobilization process of protestors during Arab spring protests as reported by Baghouz (2011). Several fissures within the society exist in Algeria. These are between the French and Arabic-speaking elites, between Arab and Berber populations, between political-economic upper classes and the middle classes, between isolated intellectual groups and marginalized youth, and between secularists and Islamists. There are also geographic divisions: between the coastal north, the populations of the high plateaus and the south, or even between modern cities, outskirts, and rural areas.¹⁰² Given this many areas of friction I would like to focus on the two most pressing ones, both politically and historically – the Arab and Berber question and the rift between Islamists and secularists. These two cleavage lines are used by the government to co-opt all sides or to play the groups against each other.¹⁰³

From a historical perspective, the national consciousness represents a problematic area. From 35 million Berbers living mainly in North Africa, 12 million live in Algeria constituting the largest minority (one fourth of the population)¹⁰⁴. After fighting for independence, the national

¹⁰² Chena, S. (2011). L'ALGÉRIE DANS LE « PRINTEMPS ARABE »

¹⁰³ Volpi, F. (2013). Algeria versus the Arab Spring

¹⁰⁴ Alilat, D. (2019, December 26). *Touareg, Kabyles, Rifains... Qui sont Les Berbères d'Algérie ?* Geo.fr. Retrieved April 7, 2020, from <https://www.geo.fr/voyage/touareg-kabyles-rifains-qui-sont-les-berberes-183310>

movement represented by the FLN based its ideology on Islam and Arabic language as “unifying features” rather than reflecting the demographic figures and the Berber aspect. Even though the Berber role in the fight for independence was crucial (the majority of rebels during the French colonization were of Berber origin) and the Berber population suffered heavy losses under the French occupation,¹⁰⁵ this was not reflected in the post-independence narrative and the actual situation on the ground. Instead, Arabic was proclaimed the official language, and Berber claims described as “obstacles to national integration”¹⁰⁶ and hence their role was marginalized. Despite the repressive environment, the notion of Berber identity began to spread after independence through standardizing their language, the promotion of Berber identity through newspapers and cultural associations, and the creation of political parties. Following the political opening of 1989, two parties associated with the Berber minority were formed – *Rassemblement pour la Culture et la Démocratie* (RCD) and *Front des Forces Sociales* (FFS). During the years following the civil war, the regime conceded to some demands of the movement and RCD even joined the ruling coalition. However, these breakthroughs did not achieve anything in the direction of self-determination. Moreover, it discredited the Berber parties in the eyes of its own constituency.¹⁰⁷

The second main cleavage is based on the different views of secularists and Islamists on the role of religion in the administration. According to the Algeria constitution. Islam is one of “fundamental components”¹⁰⁸ of Algerian identity and over 98% of the population sees itself as Muslims according to the Pew Research Centre.¹⁰⁹ While Islam occupies a central place in the Algerian society, there was always friction between the state and a number of Islamic movements in the political arena.

The first stirrings of political Islam can be attributed to a movement of *ulama’* in the 1920s following the reformist trend in the Middle East. These scholars formed the Association of Algerian Muslim Ulama (AOMA) which called for the return to the true Islamic values.¹¹⁰ After

¹⁰⁵ Silverstein, P. (2005). States of fragmentation in North Africa, p.26-27

¹⁰⁶ Silverstein, P. (2005). States of fragmentation in North Africa, p.26-27

¹⁰⁷ Silverstein, P. (2005). States of fragmentation in North Africa, p.28

¹⁰⁸ Constitution Of the People’s Democratic Republic of Algeria, Retrieved from http://confinder.richmond.edu/admin/docs/local_algeria.pdf

¹⁰⁹ *Table: Muslim population by country*. (2019, December 31). Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project. <https://www.pewforum.org/2011/01/27/table-muslim-population-by-country/>

¹¹⁰ Ghanem, D. (2019). The Shifting Foundations of Political Islam in Algeria

independence in 1962, three categories of Islamist movements evolved according to Sour (2016).

1. *Religious-political movements*. A category represented by charitable organizations that try to advocate for Islamic values and re-islamize the society through educational, cultural, and other peaceful activities. The majority of these movements formed after independence while building on experience of AOMA. An association el-Qiyam el-Islamiya (Islamic Values) and al-Irshad wal-Islah (Guidance and Reform) fall into this category.¹¹¹ El-Qiyam built its agenda on the thinking of a Muslim Brotherhood member Sayyid Qutb. Again, this group promoted Islamic values and Islamization of the public life in Saudi style (much stricter rules of public life) while being non-violent.¹¹² Understanding the potential of this threat, the governments of Houari Boumédiène and of Ahmed Ben Bella worked to appease the Islamists. The term “Islamic socialism” was used in the public discourse and tried to appeal to connect modernity and traditionalism.¹¹³ Later on, the state promoted an Arabization agenda, allowed the Islamists to exercise a certain level of influence over the educational system and university campuses in the country. However, the Islamists kept on criticizing the approach of the state. A pamphlet was published by el-Qiyam, announcing that leaders and regimes who are not relying on Islam or sharia are illegal and dangerous.¹¹⁴ In return, the government answered with building of new mosques, financing of Islamic institutes, and promoting seminars on Islam.
2. *Political-religious movements*: This is a category of political parties striving to gain influence through the electoral arena. Islamist political parties partly evolved from the religious-political movements in the late 1980s during the political liberalization period. Some later joined the FIS, some ventured by themselves. Parties such as *Hamas* (Movement of Society for Peace), *en-Nahda* (Renaissance) and *el-Islah* (Reform) subscribe to this agenda.¹¹⁵
3. *Radical Islamist Movements*: This section is composed of hard-line militant groups which seek to transform the society and the form of government through an immediate

¹¹¹ Sour, L. (2016). Understanding political Islam in Algeria

¹¹² Ghanem, D. (2019). The Shifting Foundations of Political Islam in Algeria

¹¹³ Ghanem, D. (2019). The Shifting Foundations of Political Islam in Algeria

¹¹⁴ Ghanem, D. (2019). The Shifting Foundations of Political Islam in Algeria

¹¹⁵ Sour, L. (2016). Understanding political Islam in Algeria

and violent means. The majority of these jihadi militias mushroomed during the civil war. These movements are on the list of terrorist organizations in Algeria and in the West and include, among others, *Mouvement Islamique Armée* (MIA), *Groupe Islamique Armé* (GIA), and *al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb* (AQMI). While MIA and GIA were focused only on the Algerian state, AQMI “subscribes to the global terrorist network's agenda and ideas”.¹¹⁶

Therefore, even the most cautious and non-violent movements were striving to change the country's laws, denounce the system of governance, and anchor the legal system in sharia. This was naturally viewed by the secularist camp as dangerous.¹¹⁷

Even though the Algerian Islamist movement was very heterogeneous, ranging from peaceful reformists to violent radicals, it managed to cooperate in terms of creating an umbrella organization called *Fronte Islamique de Salut* (FIS) in 1989 during the liberalization period and joined the elections' fray.¹¹⁸ After their electoral victory, the army stepped in and the civil war ensued. Notably, some argue that the military putsch took place with the support of other secular and human rights associations. The fact that secular movements committed to the democratic process and political liberalization preferred to see an authoritarian regime restored rather than another opposition group winning left a painful dent in the Islamist-secular relationship.¹¹⁹

The differences can be seen on the ideological level as well. While Islamists view the history of Algeria through the prism of righteous jihad against the French and later against the secular government (which, in their view, hijacked the war for independence), the secularists position themselves as a bulwark against terrorists and radical Islamists. Therefore, Bouteflika's secularist government often mentioned the threat of terrorism when undertaking special measures and for building its reputation as a protector of its people.¹²⁰

As Bouteflika asserted control, the government looked for ways to restore stability and repair the damage done by the war. The FIS was banned but the administration included other peaceful Islamist movements such as *Hamas*. Different attitudes of various Islamist parties led to conflicts among them. *Hamas* was supportive of the government and participated in all the elections even during the 1990's while *GIA* and other radical parties were waging a guerrilla

¹¹⁶ Sour, L. (2016). Understanding political Islam in Algeria

¹¹⁷ McAllister, E. (2013). Immunity to the Arab Spring?

¹¹⁸ Cavatorta, F., & Elananza, A. (2008). Political opposition in civil society, p.561-578

¹¹⁹ Cavatorta, F., & Elananza, A. (2008). Political opposition in civil society, p.561-578

¹²⁰ Zoubir, Y. H. (2011). The Arab Spring, p.4

war against it.¹²¹ This arrangement only shows the complicated situation opposition parties of both secular and Islamist origin had to manoeuvre through. In general, hard-line Islamists viewed secularists as collaborators of the regime, and secularists associated Islamism with terrorism and radical jihadism.¹²²

The distrust among both society and different sections of the elite was strong, nevertheless, there were levels at which Islamists and secularists were able to cooperate. Many people disappeared during the “black decade” and their families knew nothing of their fate. When the “national reconciliation programme” (Charter for Peace and National Reconciliation) was put forward by Bouteflika in 2005, an association *Djazairouna* and an Islamist group *Disparus – SOS* worked together to pressure the government to release information about the disappearances. *Djazairouna* strives to find out what happened to people abducted by the Islamist forces while *Disparus* focuses on those missing by the hands of the state.¹²³ Another point, on which both sides agreed, was the questionable morality of the programme itself. In effect, the national reconciliation meant that information about the disappeared would be disclosed in exchange for immunity for the perpetrators, the jihadists, and the security services. Both Ali Benhadj (a former leader of the FIS) and the Algerian League for Human Rights were on the same page and strongly condemned the transitional justice programme.¹²⁴

Despite some of the cooperation the Islamist and secular movements are still very much divided over many issues. Even though they use the tools of democracy and try to protect human rights, their views on how Algeria should look like differ.

1.4.2 Opposition in 2011

As recounted earlier in A Closer Look on Algeria during Arab Spring, in reaction to the riots in January 2011, the NCCD was founded to bring together the opposition and demand reforms from the regime. However, its work was symbolized mainly by its inability to bring together different sections of society. While the values it stood for and the reforms it called for were understandable for everybody and echoed by the opposition, it did not manage to unite the

¹²¹ Ghanem, D. (2019). The Shifting Foundations of Political Islam in Algeria

¹²² Volpi, F. (2013). Algeria versus the Arab Spring

¹²³ Cavatorta, F., & Elananza, A. (2008). Political opposition in civil society, p.561-578

¹²⁴ Cavatorta, F., & Elananza, A. (2008). Political opposition in civil society, p.561-578

various opposition groups into a single platform and it faced markable difficulties. Although it was primarily represented by human rights activists such as Ali Yahia Abdenmour, this movement did not attract much attention precisely because of the rifts in the society and because of its credibility.¹²⁵ Several issues that discouraged people from participating in the protests arose: a credibility of the movement, a conflict between Islamists and secularists, a discrediting campaign in the news, and a quick disintegration of the movement.

NCCD made a mistake in joining forces with former governmental politicians such as former Prime Minister Ahmed Benbitour and Said Saadi's RCD party, which was primarily focused on promoting Berber interests and known for its collaboration with the state.¹²⁶ Even though NCCD could boast some people who genuinely advocated for reforms, many members were viewed as opportunists of all stripes who were only exploiting this as a chance to enter the political machine and capitalize on it.¹²⁷ On top of this opportunism, the majority of the first demonstrations that began especially in the poorer suburbs ended up violently with protestors burning governmental offices and looting shops and malls. Even though the NCCD later called for restraint on the side of protestors and for "a peaceful march"¹²⁸ and actually kept their protests relatively peaceful, the damage was already done and turned away other potential protestors.

In order to bridge differences between secularist and Islamist camps, the National Coordination tried to cooperate with Islamist movements at the beginning, but they continued to clash with each other on basic issues such as when to protest. Fridays were favoured by Islamists as days of *chutba* – the Friday prayer. The protests would start after the prayer so that all the mosque-goers could join as well. Not only would this tactic make sense in terms of larger numbers of protestors, but it would have also followed the same dynamics which were typical for other countries experiencing the Arab Spring such as Egypt. NCCD, on the other hand, preferred Saturdays specifically out of fear that the protests would be portrayed as a radical Islamist insurrection. Given the country's violent history this was a valid point, but it only drove the wedge deeper between the secularists and Islamist groups it could potentially ally with. This eventually led to Algerians nicknaming the Saturday protests *Said Samedi* - Said's Saturday

¹²⁵ Volpi, F. (2013). Algeria versus the Arab Spring

¹²⁶ Volpi, F. (2013). Algeria versus the Arab Spring

¹²⁷ Baghzouz, A. (2011). L'Algérie et les révoltes arabes

¹²⁸ Liberte-algerie.com. (n.d.). *La CNCD VA se redéployer pour vulgariser Sa plate-forme.*

<http://www.liberte-algerie.com/>. <https://www.liberte-algerie.com/actualite/la-cncd-va-se-redeployer-pour-vulgariser-sa-plate-forme-90675/print/1>

(this could be also translated using the Arabic word *sa'id* as Happy Saturday) and mocking the protests.¹²⁹

Despite the fact that the NCCD made considerable efforts to not to be seen as related to radical Islamists, it proved fruitless against the regime's propaganda. Both the presence of Islamists and the participation of Kabyle political party (RND) were exploited by the regime which launched a discrediting news campaign. This campaign portrayed the protestors either as radicals or solely as Kabyle movement.¹³⁰ This was yet another reason that repulsed people from joining the protests.

This wedge between Islamists and secularists was also fuelled by the fear of the secular part of the opposition that the Islamists would hijack the revolution again. This fear was based on the landslide win of Islamists in the 1991 elections, which were followed in 1992 by a military coup with a civil conflict ensuing. Hence, the liberals and secularists decided to go against the regime without allying themselves with the Islamists. This broadening chasm between Islamists and secularists was chiefly illustrated when the former FIS leader Ali Belhadj tried to join a demonstration but was expelled by the protesters themselves.¹³¹

When the CNCD split after the second march on 19 February into "politicians" - RCD and other smaller parties - and "civil society", the opposition fell into disarray.¹³² Ahmed Benbitour established his *Alliance National pour le Changement* and incorporated into this platform some Islamist movements such as *el-Islah* and *el-Infitah* (opening). Simultaneously, many parties needed to take a stand in relation to Arab Spring (in what sense) and the reforms proposed by Bouteflika in his speech from 16th April 2011. They expressed their views on the protests and presented their plans for reforms. Sometimes they found common ground but predominantly, they differed from one another and were not able to come forward with anything that would entice people to protest.

This can be demonstrated on the example of the main opposition parties. The FFS announced that the confidence of Algerians in the regime must be first established before drafting of the constitution and the party proposed the election of a constituent assembly and a formation of a transitional government.¹³³ In contrast, Said's RCD signalled that any reforms introduced by

¹²⁹ Zoubir, Y. H. (2011). The Arab Spring, p.3-4

¹³⁰ Baghzouz, A. (2011). L'Algérie et les révoltes arabes

¹³¹ McAllister, E. (2013). Immunity to the Arab Spring? , p.9

¹³² Chena, S. (2011). L'ALGÉRIE DANS LE « PRINTEMPS ARABE »

¹³³ Baghzouz, A. (2011). L'Algérie et les révoltes arabes

the government would be only a “re-plastering” and would not indicate any changes to the status quo.¹³⁴ Meanwhile, Louisa Hanoune, leader of the Worker’s Party, proclaimed that reforms are necessary and that early elections should be held. However, she also criticized the NATO intervention in Libya and warned that “Algeria is in the crosshairs” of the great powers, that “sovereignty of Maghreb is threatened” and that “this aggression smells of Pan-Sahel plan, Africom, and the Greater Middle East project”.¹³⁵ Some parties proposed that only presidential elections would rescue the country from chaos while other called for respect of the law. Some indicated that Algeria should follow the “Turkish model”¹³⁶, where role of the army is limited, and democracy and Islam are intertwined. The Islamists from *el-Islah* under Abdallah Djaballah suggested nationwide conference for debating reforms in five key domains: political, economic, judiciary, administrative and social.¹³⁷

Yet another issue which opposition had to face had been the incertitude of who to overthrow in order to bring meaningful changes. Such problem stems from the diffusion of power in Algeria often referred to as *the deep state* or in French *le pouvoir*. It is generally thought that the toppling of Bouteflika would only purport a change of the leader but no reform of the underlying regime structure.¹³⁸ This represents one of the differences between opposition in 2011 and 2019. In 2019, the protestors were not only demanding to oust Bouteflika, but they aimed to change the entire system.¹³⁹

Clearly, the opposition disunity posed a considerable obstacle for many people to join the protests. The protests conducted under the leadership of NCCD lasted only through February. Out of all the protests aimed against the regime including those organized by the NCCD, only one managed to surpass the limit of ten thousand protestors according to its organizers. The rest

¹³⁴ Baghzouz, A. (2011). L’Algérie et les révoltes arabes

¹³⁵ Loucif M. (2011, March 23). «L’Algérie est dans Le collimateur». L'Expression. <https://www.lexpressiondz.com/index.php/nationale/lalgerie-est-dans-le-collimateur-130112>.

¹³⁶ Mokhefi, M. (2013). Le Maghreb dans la politique arabe de la Turquie

¹³⁷ Baghzouz, A. (2011). L’Algérie et les révoltes arabes

¹³⁸ Volpi, F. (2013). Algeria versus the Arab Spring

¹³⁹ Boubekour, A. (2020). Demonstration Effects

of the protests oscillated between “hundreds of protestors” and “several thousands of protestors”.¹⁴⁰

¹⁴⁰Thousands in Algeria protest march: organisers. (2011, January 30). AFP. <https://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5iZS5LUIm9s22lV2sYXu1rKSYWhzQ?docId=CNG.4f79fd54def547db7a5c9f08426c8b87.d51>

1.4.3 Opposition in 2019

There are several remarkable feats that *Hirak* managed to accomplish and that clearly differentiate it from the protests in 2011. It had created a platform in which all sections of society could participate and better handle the two rifts between Islamists and secularists and Arabs and Berbers. Furthermore, *Hirak* sought to keep the demonstrations peaceful and tried to form a dialogue with the army.

The movement? It brought together different sections of society, so all classes were represented – the wealthy and the poor alike, women and men, the youth and the elderly, and members of the entire political spectrum. Whole families regularly joined the *masīra* (march).¹⁴¹ The peaceful and festive atmosphere of the protests proved crucial to the continuity of *Hirak*. People repeatedly joined the march in order to express their views, compare satirical slogans, meet with friends, or to listen to the opposition leaders' speeches. A new verb was invented – *vendredire* – “Friday speaking”¹⁴² and the marches became a sort of a traditional event that people did not want to miss.

Another crucial aspect of the demonstrations was the co-existence of the secular and the Islamist groups. In stark contrast to the upheavals in 2011, the main protests took place on Fridays after the *chuṭba* (Friday prayer) and could, therefore, count on the support of mosque-goers. While slogans like “*dawla 'islamīya*” (Islamic state) could be sporadically heard, the majority of associations and groups refrained from pushing their individual agenda and focused on the common goal of ousting Bouteflika and changing the *nizām* (system).¹⁴³

As opposed to the often violent protests in 2011, *Hirak* promoted *muṣāharāt silmīya* (peaceful demonstrations) and focused on non-violent means of protesting. Instead of burning and looting which occurred in 2011, people were singing nationalistic songs like *Min Jibālīnā* (From Our Mountains) and used satire in this newly created political space in which they could express their frustration without violence. An unofficial anthem of *Hirak* became the song of football fans *La Casa del Mouradia*, which explains the unchanging political situation under the “dead

¹⁴¹ From Protesta to Hirak to Algeria's New Revolutionary Moment, in Middle East Report, 2019 (pp.10-14)

¹⁴² Serres, T. (2019). Understanding Algeria's 2019 Revolutionary Movement

¹⁴³ Volpi, F. (2020). Algeria: When elections hurt democracy

doll” (Bouteflika). La Casa refers to the Spanish TV series *La Casa del Papel* about a money heist and Mouradia is the part of Algiers where the presidential palace is situated.

Such activities did not provide the regime with legitimate incentives or pretexts for deploying the army or violently cracking down on the protesters. The number of people detained stayed low in comparison with the jailing of activists elsewhere in the region, even though there remained around 100 activists in prison during the elections in December 2019.¹⁴⁴

When the regime warned of “attempts to undermine country’s territorial integrity” and began to prosecute activists waving or carrying Amazigh (Berber) flags, the opposition answered with a deliberate show of more of Berber colours while chanting: “*Kabyli, Arabi, khawa, khawa. Makansh el-fitna ya khawana*” (Berbers and Arabs are brothers. There is no strife you traitors)¹⁴⁵. In standing together with the Amazigh, the movement bridged differences that were used by the regime in 2011 to undermine the protests. Therefore, more people could identify with the movement and participate.

Among many things the opposition had done in an improved fashion, in contrast with protests in 2011, was the “evoking of a mythical relationship” between the people and the army.¹⁴⁶ This was a reference to the official historical discourse in which both the people and the army were heroized during the struggle for independence against the French. The narrative of this relationship went as follows: The former colonial masters are gone, but they were replaced by the government which is exercising an “internal colonialism”,¹⁴⁷ once again confiscating the two hard-won inheritances of the anticolonial struggle – the country’s wealth and its independence. Therefore, the people and the army must unite once again against their new enemy, the system. On one hand, the opposition assured the army they are on their side while chanting “*Jaysh, sha’ab, khawa khawa*” (The army and the people are brothers). On the other, they insisted that the army should have a designated role outside of the political arena as these

¹⁴⁴ Volpi, F. (2020). Algeria: When elections hurt democracy

¹⁴⁵ Brahimi N. (2019, June 20). *Emblèmes autres Que Le Drapeau national : Gaïd Salah déploie la mise en garde*. REPORTERS ALGERIE - Quotidien National d’Information. <https://www.reporters.dz/emblemes-autres-que-le-drapeau-national-gaid-salah-deploie-la-mise-en-garde/>

¹⁴⁶ Serres, T. (2019). Understanding Algeria’s 2019 Revolutionary Movement

¹⁴⁷ Serres, T. (2019). Understanding Algeria’s 2019 Revolutionary Movement

slogans prove: “*Dawla madanīya mashi askarīya*” (A civil, not a military state) and “*Jumhūrīya mashi cazerna*” (A republic is not a barrack).¹⁴⁸

Moreover, in presenting the protests as a strife of common people against the regime laid the movement’s credibility. Opposition parties joined the movement, cooperated on the creation of committees, and tried to advocate their demands in a coherent manner. Naturally, not everyone was on the same page, but the protestors did not let the movement succumb to a specific party’s agenda. In contrast with events in 2011, protestors called for civilian leadership of the state, but they did not let a single person take the reins of power.¹⁴⁹ Thus, potential protestors were assured that the movement would not be hijacked by pro-regime cadres or any other opportunist who would exploit it for their own benefits and agendas.

Through positioning the movement against the *system*, *Hirak* had signalled to everybody that the goal was not just the abdication of Bouteflika. As one protestor put it when interviewed by Sky News Arabia “*Yetnahou ga ‘a!*” (They all need to go)¹⁵⁰. The wording “They all” is understood in Algeria as the entire cartelized and militarized regime structure – from the security services, major businessmen, and the government institutions to trade unions, political parties connected to the regime, semi-autonomous associations, and even to Sufi brotherhoods, so-called *zawiyas*.¹⁵¹ Thus, *Hirak* showed that it would not be appeased by the exchange of a few figures at the top of the pyramid but called for the entire system of co-optation and patronage to “*dégager*” (leave). Such a firm stance of the movement helped create a bond among the protestors, so they showed up repeatedly at the demonstrations. It also appealed to the silent majority of Algerians who had felt they could not change the system by themselves, for instance through elections.¹⁵²

Nevertheless, for all its success the movement faced a serious challenge. The most profound issue lay in the representation of the movement and subsequent negotiations with the post-Bouteflika regime. While it succeeded in voicing their anger against a common enemy, divergent opinions on how to continue with the transition were commonplace inside the movement. This stance, which was described by journalists as “an organized but not

¹⁴⁸ Volpi, F. (2020). Algeria: When elections hurt democracy

¹⁴⁹ Serres, T. (2019). Understanding Algeria’s 2019 Revolutionary Movement

¹⁵⁰ Illiten TV (Youtube profile). (2019, March 23). *La célèbre vidéo buzz du jeune qui as dit Yetnahaw Gaa*. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VBWJyygkRLg>

¹⁵¹ Entelis, J. P. (2011). Algeria: Democracy denied, and revived?

¹⁵² Desrues, T., & Gobe, É. (2019). Introduction : Quand l’Algérie proteste, p.6-8

structured”¹⁵³ proved problematic since the regime had nobody to negotiate with. Experience of democratic movements around the world shows that negotiations between the power-holders and the opposition necessitates an intermediary who is usually recruited from the opposition parties or from the civil society (for instance a human rights association, a union or other professional collective).¹⁵⁴

In order to correct this situation, several platforms emerged to fill the place of an intermediary – Forum Civil pour le Changement, which was formed in March 2019, evolved in June into Dynamiques de la Société Civile. This group tried to coordinate the actions of *Hirak* in relation to the interim government and established a dialogue committee led by a politician active in the 2000s Karim Younes.¹⁵⁵ Work of the opposition in negotiations and plan-creating was crucial because the leaderless *Hirak* required a direction in which it could focus – without a coherent plan the protests would quickly subside. Thus, opposition gave the movement a framework in which it could operate and a space in which it could negotiate with the regime. In response to these activities, another section of the movement led by RCD, FFS and Algerian League for Human Rights formed their own coalition for negotiations with the regime. However, the hopeful progress was hindered because of the bad reputation of some opposition parties (MSP, RCD) as “government lackeys” and by the fact that these dialogue forums were not representative of the entire *Hirak*.¹⁵⁶ The challenge of creating a viable “transitional road map” towards political change and pressuring the regime into acknowledging them as a responsible negotiation partner still lies ahead of the movement.¹⁵⁷

All in all, *Hirak* succeeded in portraying the protests as an anticolonial struggle against the regime which is committing “*Irḥāb idārī*”¹⁵⁸ (administrative terrorism – meaning corruption and sabotaging any reforms). Through connecting it to the fight for independence against the French it showed how the regime also became in fact a form of colonialism against which the people of Algeria need to unite regardless of gender, religiosity, political affiliation, age or ethnicity. The opposition parties joined the protests and strived to create a framework for

¹⁵³ Aït-Hamadouche, L. D., & Dris, C. (2019). Le face à face hirak-pouvoir

¹⁵⁴ Aït-Hamadouche, L. D., & Dris, C. (2019). Le face à face hirak-pouvoir

¹⁵⁵ Volpi, F. (2020). Algeria: When elections hurt democracy

¹⁵⁶ Boubekour, A. (2020). Demonstration Effects

¹⁵⁷ Boubekour, A. (2020). Demonstration Effects

¹⁵⁸ Boubekour, A. (2020). Demonstration Effects

negotiations. They did not stay fully united – different commissions for negotiation with the government were created. Nevertheless, when compared with the protests in 2011, the effort of putting aside their own grievances paid off. Instead of promoting their own agendas and voicing individual plans for reform, the opposition parties decided to voice their plans together. The success of the opposition was also boosted by the fact that they tried to separate themselves from the regime and that they promoted a complete reform of the system. Through portraying the demonstrations as a form of patriotic duty and a social gathering, people were more inclined to join the protests repeatedly. The duration of the protests in 2019 was therefore much longer than in 2011 because of the higher degree of unity of the opposition.

1.5 Conclusion

Protests in the Arab world during 2010-2011 led to the fall of several autocratic regimes, the rise of new dictators, and a few civil wars. Although the wave of uprisings flooded many states of the MENA, the intensity and duration of the protests varied widely. Specifically, Algeria seemed unaffected by these protests and experienced its own massive demonstrations during 2019 eight years later.

In my dissertation, I tried to solve the puzzle of protests in Algeria by comparing two very similar cases with two vastly differing outcomes. In order to answer the key question - why where the 2019 protests in Algeria considerably more widespread than in 2011 - I studied the duration and the size of the protests. In 2011, only several thousand people protested, and the protests ended after a month. In 2019, millions joined the protest movement and continued to show up for an entire year.

Based on the opening chapter titled Historical Background, I investigated and argued the explanations aiming at answering the question “why was there no Arab spring in Algeria”, which were proposed by academia and the journalists at its time. There were six factors: (1) traumatic memories (2) threat of foreign intervention (3) role of security apparatus (4) the oil curse (5) alienation from politics and (6) opposition unity. Through my analysis of the events, I concluded that it was the opposition unity that played a major role during 2011 and that the rest of the explanations is imperfect, misleading, or irrelevant. Secondly, I explored the situation in Algeria during the 2019 *Hirak* protests and I studied the impact of opposition unity (as a factor requiring more attention) on duration and size of the movement. My analysis showed that the opposition unity represented a crucial aspect in the continuation – i.e. duration – of the protests but that it had little effect on the high turnout of protestors (size). Instead of promoting their own agendas and voicing individual plans for reform, the opposition parties decided to voice their plans together. The success of the opposition could be seen in its separation from the regime and in the promotion of a complete reform of the system. Through portraying the demonstrations as a form of patriotic duty and a social gathering, people were more inclined to join the protests repeatedly. A question worth of asking is: Were the actions taken, and the tactics employed by *Hirak* influenced by the experience from protests in 2011? While in the case of behaviour of the opposition, the differences between 2011 and 2019 are clearly visible, in terms of the entire movement, I can not answer with certainty based only on the literature I cited.

However, I need to admit, that I centred my research on 2019 and my subsequent argumentation primarily around the factor of opposition unity. The status of factors, which I discarded as defunct or simply wrong for the situation in 2011, might have changed between 2011 and 2019 and therefore, its impact on the protests might be important as well. However, I chose the opposition unity as a factor of higher importance and therefore, focused my dissertation solely in that direction. The platform created by the opposition has become a space for Algerians to voice their demands and that represents major progress in public discussion.

It is difficult to predict what will happen with the *Hirak* and the opposition after the end of current measures. The organizers called the protests off after the breakout of coronavirus disease in spring 2020 but they promised to continue once the movement restrictions imposed by the government are lifted. The government can, therefore, ignore the protestors for now, but it must cope with new challenges mainly in healthcare for which it did not prepare. We will see whether the opposition will use its time to propose a solid plan for Algerians and to point out more issues which the government neglected or whether the government will benefit from the current state of affairs and control the situation as it is used to.

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